

## MEMO

TO: Planning and Economic Development Committee of City Council  
DATE: 8/19/2014  
FROM: Stephanie Monson, Urban Planner for Community and Economic Development  
SUBJECT: City of Asheville 2014 Application for Tourism Product Development Fund Grant

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### Summary:

City staff desires authorization to apply for \$3 million in grant funds (for project construction costs of over \$10 million) from the Buncombe County Tourism Development Authority.

Applications are due August 20, 2014 and the Buncombe County TDA will announce grant awardees and amounts in October.

### Background:

The purpose of the Tourism Product Development Grant is to provide funding assistance with construction projects that will create new and additional lodging room nights in Buncombe County. City staff proposes to submit an application that if successful, will result in funding assistance to construct French Broad riverfront revitalization projects that are particularly well suited to help increase the number of visitations and length of stays by tourists.

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The City of Asheville's Riverfront District Development Project proposal to the TDA includes:

- 1) Construction of a signed and marketed network of riverfront walk and bike ways that will help people explore and connect to the district; this network will effectively knit together major attractions and also functions, like San Antonio's Riverwalk, as a destination in itself. Projects include:
  - *French Broad River Greenway West Bank connection: New Belgium Brewing Asheville to French Broad River Park*- This one- and-a-half mile multi-use path will connect the city's most beautiful riverfront park and the three miles of existing riverfront greenways and parks beyond it with the production and visitor's facilities and tasting room for the United States third largest craft brewery (New Belgium Brewing Asheville).
  - *French Broad River Greenway East Bank connection: Craven Street to 14 Riverside Drive*- This experience-filled multi use path through the heart of the most urbane section of riverfront will connect visitors to 170 local artists, a constructed wetland that doubles as public art, and the future site of 300,000 to 1 million square feet of new mixed use development on Riverside Drive.
  - *Clingman Forest Greenway*- This half mile of hilly urban forest is populated by a plethora of native plants and a small stream. It takes visitors from the heart of the River Arts District into downtown Asheville's western edge via Aston Park.
  - *5 points roundabout pedestrian connection*- This will be a future landmark that serves to connect and orient visitors between the Clingman Forest and Town Branch Greenways.
  - *Town Branch Greenway*- This mile of relatively flat walking path takes you from the independent restaurants, galleries and studios lining Depot Street, to the south slope of downtown and the medical district, all while interpreting local history.
- 2) Construction of critical public amenities like restrooms , safe pedestrian connections, boat ramps and visitor information kiosks that keep people in the district longer, and link and leverage the existing and the proposed tourism attractions built by the private sector. Projects include:
  - *Public restrooms*- There will be four clean and open-for-business public toilets at the 14 Riverside Drive Arts and Culture Dispensary.

- *Visitor information kiosk at 14 Riverside Drive*- This will be an unstaffed, high tech place to learn about shopping, studios, galleries, events and eateries in the River Arts District, with cross referencing to the info kiosk at Craven Street.
  - *Visitor information kiosk at the Public Parking Lot at Craven Street Bridge*- This will be an unstaffed, low tech place to learn about trails, greenways, river history and outdoor recreation, with cross referencing to the info kiosk at 14 Riverside Drive.
  - *Boat Ramp at Amboy Road* –This new river access point will give anglers and motorized boat enthusiasts ample parking and easy access to a day on the French Broad river.
  - *Improved Boat Ladder and park amenities at Jean Webb Park*- This improvement will give kayakers and canoeists a highly visibly and easy place to put-in or take out after a day on the river, or serve as a great place to “people-on-the-river” watch.
  - *Amboy Road Crosswalk to Smoky Mountain Adventure Center*- This project will create a safe passage between a new climbing center/ outdoor recreation hub and the public parking, public boat ramp, and public river access just across the street.
- 3) Construction of two new attractions: a new riverfront arts and culture venue that also supports river access and river use; and a set of train spotting venue trackside at Lyman Street that will draw visitors in with the promise of an entertaining and an educational trackside experience, all while providing protection from the elements, a place to rest for a while, and a safe way to navigate across the tracks to the River Arts District's other desirable attractions.
- *14 Riverside Drive Arts and Culture Dispensary*, When completed, this historic waterfront building will be renovated to support highly visible arts and culture programming and increase awareness of, and connection to, the French Broad River.
  - *The Train Spotting Venue*- These artist built shelters on either side of the Lyman Street at-grade railroad crossing that are the perfect place to watch the trains go by and learn about the contributions of the railroad industry to the history of Asheville and Western North Carolina.

#### Staff/Commission Review:

- A successful grant application will diversify and increase the City's funding resources for riverfront development projects, resulting in greater fiscal sustainability.
- If awarded funds, the City will be required to partner with CVB on marketing efforts for the district (in particular, marketing the pieces of riverfront destination that are solely the City's, such as the greenway and multi-use path network) which will require some additional resources (to create useful maps and distribute them, e.g.)
- The Asheville Area Riverfront Redevelopment Commission is scheduled to review the application details and consider signing a letter of support for the grant and advising Council about AARRC support or concerns at their meeting on August 14, 2014.

#### Request for Consideration:

- Staff has placed this item on Council's August 26<sup>th</sup> agenda, which is past the TPDF grant application due date. Staff asks the PED committee to consider providing a recommendation for staff to submit the application in a timely manner, in advance of Council's consideration to authorize the application.

